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Fleming to Head Public Broadcasting

His experience in balancing Michigan's needs for independence and accountability cited

WASHINGTON
Robben W. Fleming, who in January will take over as president of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, admits that he gets "a very blurred version of public television" on his car at the president's house at the University of Michigan.

Mr. Fleming, who has been president of Michigan since 1968, said reception at his house was marred by interference from a nearby high-rise building.

But even so, he said, he liked what he had seen on public television far better than the fare on commercial TV.

"I don't watch [commercial television] enough to be a really good judge of it, but sometimes I have enormous difficulty staying awake when I do watch it," he said.

Mr. Fleming's selection as C.P.B. president was announced here this month at a meeting of the corporation's board.

He said he was leaving the Michigan job partly "because I've always felt that universities need periodic changes in their top leadership. I felt I should set a good example."

Taking a Pay Cut

In making the move, Mr. Fleming will be taking a pay cut. The \$70,000-a-year salary at C.P.B. is about \$5,000 less than what he is paid at Michigan. In addition, because of C.P.B. rules, he will have to give up two lucrative directorships—one in Chrysler Corporation, the other in John Deere and Company.

"There is no way in which I can emerge from this decision economically whole," he said, "which would suggest either that I am out of my mind or that I am genuinely interested in the field. There are people who take both views."

When Mr. Fleming made that comment, Henry B. Loomis, the present C.P.B. president, noted in an aside that the two conditions were not necessarily mutually exclu-



CHRONICLE PHOTOGRAPH BY MALCOLM G. SCULLY
Robben W. Fleming hopes to expand the audience for public television and radio as the new president of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

sive. Last December, Mr. Loomis announced his intention to retire before the end of 1978.

While Mr. Fleming has had little direct experience in public broadcasting, members of the corporation's board evidently were attracted by his reputation as an administrator and his experience in coping with the problems of maintaining the autonomy of an institution when it depends on federal and state support.

Amos B. Hostetter, Jr., chairman of the corporation's search committee, noted that Mr. Fleming "has had considerable experience and success in balancing that institu-

tion's needs for both independence and accountability."

Since he has had little experience in the field of public broadcasting, Mr. Fleming was reluctant to comment substantively on the issues now facing the field.

'Enormously Exciting Instrument'

He said he felt that public broadcasting was "an enormously exciting instrument for reaching people in the country." He also indicated that one major challenge facing public broadcasting was "to broaden the spectrum of its audience so that you're really speaking to a broad segment of our society."

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He is taking over the presidency at a time when public broadcasting is re-examining its future and facing important technological changes.

The corporation is installing a "satellite interconnection system" that will eventually link the country's 200 public television stations and offer far more "programming" options than are now available.

The satellite will have 12 relays, four of which will be earmarked for public television and one for public radio. The eight other relays will be available to any station, producer, or network that wants and can afford to lease them.

Carnegie Commission at Work

The corporation is undergoing the scrutiny of the Carnegie Commission on the Future of Public Broadcasting, which is expected to complete its work next year.

The commission hopes to chart the course of public television and radio through the end of this century.

Back at the University of Michigan, Mr. Fleming's departure was greeted with some regret.

An editorial in the *Michigan Daily*, the student newspaper, noted that over the years students had often disagreed with his policies but had always respected him.

"It will be difficult to find another man, perhaps woman, who can fill the job as well as he," the editorial said.

The university's regents have named Allan F. Smith, professor of law and former vice-president for academic affairs, as acting president.

Before he became president at Michigan, Mr. Fleming served as chancellor of the University of Wisconsin at Madison and as professor of law at the University of Illinois. In 1976-77, he served as chairman of the American Council on Education.

—MALCOLM G. SCULLY